

Recreating Period Buttons

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Background:

Beads have been decorations for clothing and accessories since primitive times. Later in our period, buttons become more prevalent as tailoring techniques improved. In the 14th century, buttons were used to achieve the popular tightly fitting clothing.

In medieval excavations in London from the late 14th century, the primary fastening methods of the findings were buttons (Crowfoot & Staniland, 1992). A large variety of different buttons were found of both metal and textile manufacture. Metal-shank buttons found in London excavations are detailed in *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London: 3. Dress Accessories c.1150-c.1450*.

The emphasis of this class is recreating some of the cloth and textile buttons from the 14th – 16th centuries.

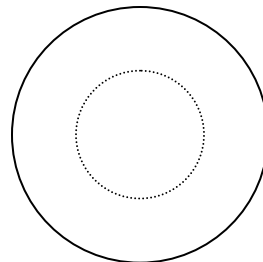
Cloth Buttons:

Cloth buttons are both inexpensive and easy to make. You can use cloth that matches the garment or cloth that contrasts the garment. Generally try to use a cloth that does not unravel. The following technique is outlined from Sarah Thursfield's *Medieval Tailor's Assistant*.

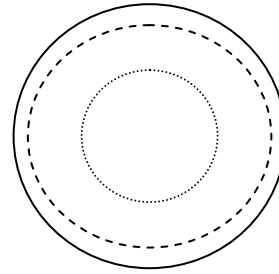
Cloth Ball Buttons:

The simplest cloth buttons are created by cutting out a circle of cloth. You may need to experiment with a few buttons to determine size. Light to medium bodied fabrics tend to be best for this type of button. Lighter fabrics may require stuffing for shaping. (Beware, a little stuffing goes a long way)

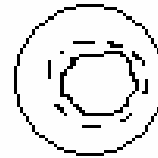
1. Cut a circle about three times larger than your expected buttonhole.
(Create a button pattern, so all your buttons will be the same size)



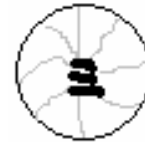
2. Stitch around the outer edge of the button in a running stitch to be gathered later.



3. Gather the button. As you gather the edge, turn the raw edge inside. At this point, you may add a small amount of stuffing. This will enclose the raw edge. Tighten completely.

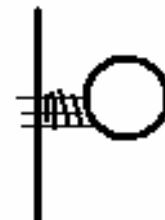


4. Secure the completely gathered edge with a few stitches.



5. Sew a few stitches from front to back to stiffen the button.

6. Your button is ready to be sewn onto your garment. After securing the button to the garment, wrap the thread around the attaching threads to create a shank.



Thread Buttons:

Wrapped Thread Buttons:

Several examples of wrapped thread buttons can be seen on extant garments in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion*.

A simple wrapped button can be made by taking a wooden bead and wrapping it with embroidery floss.

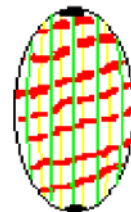
Woven Thread Buttons:

Another method of constructing periodesque buttons, is to wrap an inexpensive bead with thread which either contrast or match the garment. The technique below produces a button which is very similar to those found on surviving extant 16th century Turkish kaftans. (Rogers, 1986) This method can be used on late period European fashions as well. Take a wooden bead approximately the size of the desired button. The larger the bead, the more time and thread will be needed to complete.

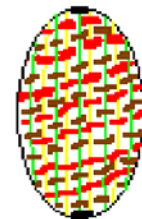
1. To make the buttons, two colors green and yellow were wrapped in parallel to the bead hole.



2. Next, the red thread was wrapped to spiral around the circumference, woven under the green thread, but woven over the yellow thread.



3. The light brown thread is then wrapped around the circumference of the bead in between the red spiral, woven under the yellow thread and over the green thread.



Naturally, the closer the threads are together, the tighter the weave is. The threads must be close enough together to cover the wooden bead. The buttons may then be sewn on to the garment.

REFERENCES

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